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Information Alert

From the National Agricultural Library



United States
Department of
Agriculture



Press Release — FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Brian Norris

(301) 504-6778; FTS: 964-6778

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National Agricultural Library Offers Free Exporting Directory

Beltsville, MD — The addresses and telephone numbers of key contacts in agricultural exporting and lists of selected exporting databases and publications are contained in the "Directory of Export and Trade Assistance" available free-of-charge from the National Agricultural Library (NAL) in Beltsville, Maryland.

The directory is intended to assist U.S. businesses involved in exporting agricultural products, according to Mary Lassanyi, coordinator of NAL's Agricultural Trade and Marketing Information Center (ATMIC), which developed the directory.

Included in the directory are a list of selected export and trade assistance resources in the Washington, D.C. area, the addresses and telephone numbers of state departments of agriculture and state government trade offices, lists of trade associations, trade organizations and international trade development centers, selected databases related to international trade and a listing of agricultural exporting books, directories, guides, hearings, reports, and journals.

"Meetings and discussions with subject and information specialists of the national and international agricultural community revealed a significant need for a greater exchange and sharing of agricultural and commercial information and data on exporting and trade," Lassanyi said. "The directory is our center's effort to begin filling that need. It provides sources of information and services to the marketing and trade community and to support the U.S. Department of Agriculture's trade and exporting experts."

Copies of the directory are available by sending a request with a self-addressed mailing label to:

Agricultural Trade and Marketing Information Center
National Agricultural Library, Room 304
10301 Baltimore Boulevard
Beltsville, Maryland 20705-2351

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The Agricultural Trade and Marketing Information Center is one of eleven information centers established by NAL to keep abreast of the most current information available on subjects of critical importance to U.S. agriculture. Other centers cover alternative farming systems, animal welfare, aquaculture, biotechnology, food and nutrition, plant genome, rural development, technology transfer, youth development, and water quality.

The National Agricultural Library is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It is the largest agricultural library in the world, containing over 2.1 million volumes and receiving 26,000 current periodical titles from throughout the world. With the Library of Congress and the National Library of Medicine, NAL is one of three national libraries of the United States.

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World Turns to NAL to Preserve Agricultural Knowledge

Beltsville, MD — With improved relations between the United States and many eastern European countries have come a flood of international visitors to the National Agricultural Library (NAL) in Beltsville, Maryland.

The visitors are agricultural librarians looking to NAL for advice in protecting their agricultural information while at the same time making the information more accessible to those who need it.

One such recent visitor was Helena Slezakova, a librarian at the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information for Agriculture in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Slezakova came to NAL because her country's agricultural knowledge is in jeopardy.

"We have also a very precious collection of old agricultural publications," Slezakova said, "but unfortunately we do not have such nice rooms for them as you have here, and a big problem is also the environment, which is much more severe in Czechoslovakia, and air pollution, which also damages the publications."

NAL Director Joseph H. Howard said that Czechoslovakia is not the only country concerned with losing its agricultural heritage. "It is a worldwide problem," Howard said. "Even here at NAL we are quite concerned with staying ahead of the dramatic deterioration of the nation's collection of agricultural information."

Slezakova spent two weeks at NAL learning how the library develops and applies new information management technology to meet this problem. She was impressed.

"I saw the optical scanning of text onto compact discs, and the optical scanning of abstracts for AGRICOLA [NAL's bibliographic database]," she said. "It was very interesting for me because I think it is a very modern technology,

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and I would like to have something like that at home. We are interested in new technology, and we would like to improve our methods of work."

Slezakova hopes to adapt some NAL systems for use at her country's agricultural institute. She was particularly interested in the online catalog portion of ISIS, NAL's integrated system automating many of the library's functions. The online catalog allows NAL patrons to find the information they need in minutes.

"I would like to be more acquainted with your ISIS system because we are now preparing the automation of our library's catalogs, and ISIS looks like an excellent system for that purpose," Slezakova said.

As for whether or not technology from the National Agricultural Library can be adapted for use by the Czechoslovaks, Slezakova said time would tell, but her country is proud of its agricultural library and tries to keep up with new technologies.

"Our library is a very great library. We have over one-million volumes. Our library is the third largest [agricultural library] in the world. The first as I know is NAL, then the agricultural library in Moscow, and then comes our library," she said. "But one of the big problems is our computers, which are old, and which sometimes function and sometimes do not."

Computer problems have frustrated Slezakova and her coworkers in many of their attempts to modernize their library. NAL has offered to share even more of its expertise with the Czechoslovaks as they work to overcome these problems.

To help in building stronger ties between the world's agricultural libraries, NAL sponsored a conference with eastern European agricultural librarians in Beltsville, Maryland, early this winter. Representatives from six eastern European countries attended, and participants vowed to continue international cooperation in preserving and exchanging agricultural knowledge. Countries represented at the conference were Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

Within the last year, NAL also has hosted agricultural librarians from the former Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, the Netherlands, Nigeria, and other countries.

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National Agricultural Library Guide to Services Available

Beltsville, MD — A free guide containing easy-to-understand instructions on how to use the many services of the National Agricultural Library (NAL) in Beltsville, Maryland, is now available from the library.

From how to get there, to how to use the NAL collection, to how to set your computer to access NAL's electronic bulletin board, the *Guide to Services of the National Agricultural Library* explains in simple language everything one needs to know to take maximum advantage of the largest collection of agricultural information in the world.

"We would like more people to use the fabulous resources we have here at NAL," said Keith Russell, NAL Associate Director for Public Services. "Users of NAL are often overwhelmed when they walk into the library and are faced with the difficulty of finding what they need from NAL's collection of more than 2.1 million items."

According to Russell, the NAL *Guide to Services* will "greatly facilitate" use of the library's services and resources. "Between the *Guide*, the helpful and knowledgeable NAL staff, and the easy-to-use computer terminals available to our patrons, users of NAL should be able to find the information they need in minutes," Russell said.

Frequently, according to Russell, the needed information can be provided by NAL without a person even going to NAL. The *Guide to Services* explains several ways this can be done.

Copies of the *Guide to Services of the National Agricultural Library* are available free-of-charge by sending a self-addressed mailing label to:

National Agricultural Library
Attn: Guide to Services, Room 204
10301 Baltimore Boulevard
Beltsville, Maryland 20705-2351

Or telephone (301) 504-6778; FTS: 964-6778.

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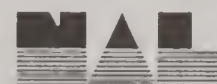
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Study Finds Nation's Agricultural Knowledge in Danger

Beltsville, MD — A large percentage of the nation's priceless collection of agricultural knowledge is deteriorating and is in danger of being lost.

That is the gist of a report recently released on the condition of agricultural materials maintained at the National Agricultural Library (NAL) in Beltsville, MD.

The report, entitled *A Preservation Plan for the National Agricultural Library*, states "that more than 50 percent of the monographs and serials in the collection are disintegrating and that more than one-fourth of the volumes are brittle, requiring that their contents be transferred to another medium in order to be useful and to escape loss to the scientific world. For a significant quantity, as yet unmeasured, it is already too late, for they are too disintegrated to be used by researchers."

The study was conducted by NAL in 1989 with assistance from the Association of Research Libraries (ARL). The purposes of the study were to determine the physical condition of the NAL collection and "the environmental factors affecting that condition," and to develop a plan to ensure the preservation of the agricultural information at NAL.

"For generations NAL has worked at preserving the nation's agricultural knowledge," said NAL Director Joseph H. Howard. "However, in recent years the task has become even more acute with more and more documents reaching the stage where they are in danger of being lost. We at NAL wanted to know the exact scope of the preservation problems at the library. The study has given us that information and we must now find solutions."

The report offers a plan for addressing the problem of preservation at NAL. Currently, NAL managers are seeking resources to put the plan into effect.

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Copies of the report are available by sending a stamped, self-addressed mailing label to:

National Agricultural Library
Attn: Preservation Plan, Room 204
10301 Baltimore Boulevard
Beltsville, Maryland 20705-2351

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NAL Bibliography Focuses on Women in Agriculture

Beltsville, MD — Women's roles in world agriculture are spotlighted in a new bibliography available from the Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC) of the National Agricultural Library (NAL). The bibliography, called "Women in Agriculture" and compiled by Jane Potter Gates of the AFSIC staff, lists nearly 500 selected articles, books, videotapes and reports published from January 1979 to July 1991 and related to the role of women in world agriculture. Citations are from NAL's AGRICOLA database and the items are contained in the NAL collection.

According to Gates, "Women in Agriculture" is intended for current awareness and is not an in depth bibliography on the subject. However, the bibliography is "a substantial resource for recent material on women in agriculture," she said.

Copies of the bibliography are available by sending a request, with a self-addressed label, to:

National Agricultural Library
Public Services Division, Room 111
10301 Baltimore Boulevard
Beltsville, MD 20705-2351

The Alternative Farming Systems Information Center is one of 11 information centers established by NAL to gather information and provide services on issues of critical importance to the agricultural community. In addition to alternative farming systems, subjects covered include: agricultural trade and marketing, animal welfare, aquaculture, biotechnology, food and nutrition, plant genome, rural development and health, technology transfer, water quality, and youth development.

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NAL and USGS Library Cooperate in Map Cataloging

Beltsville, MD — The National Agricultural Library (NAL) and the library of the United States Geological Survey (USGS) will cooperate in providing bibliographic control and housing of many of the nation's maps related to agriculture and earth science.

According to program managers, this action is expected to benefit U.S. agricultural and earth scientists "by providing a broader and more expedient access to these important and useful materials."

In a memorandum of understanding signed by the heads of the two government libraries it was agreed that NAL will be responsible for the processing of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) maps and the USGS library will catalog, store, and lend non-USDA maps in the field of earth sciences. The bibliographic records on these maps will be added to NAL's AGRICOLA (*AGRICultural OnLine Access*) database either by NAL or USGS personnel via the National Agriculture Cataloging Network.

For additional information, contact:

Idalia P. Acosta, Head
Cataloging Branch, Room 110,
National Agricultural Library
10301 Baltimore Boulevard
Beltsville, MD 20705-2351
Telephone: (301) 504-7565; FTS: 964-7565

or:

Robert Bier, Chief
Cartographic Information Section
USGS Library
12,201 Sunrise Valley Drive
Reston, VA 22092
Telephone: (703) 648-6207

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A part of USDA, NAL is the largest agricultural library in the world, containing over two million volumes and receiving 26,000 current periodicals from throughout the world. With the Library of Congress and the National Library of Medicine, NAL is one of three national libraries of the United States.

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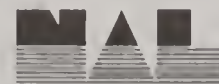
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NAL Merges Agriculture and Computers

Beltsville, MD — Most people don't associate agriculture with the orderly, high-tech environment of the computer age.

Agriculture is dirt and pungent smells and the extremes of weather. Computers are flashing screens, clicking keys, and the soft, efficient whirl of meticulously engineered equipment. The two sciences seem to have as much in common as peas and floppy disks. But then, most people don't know about the National Agricultural Library (NAL) in Beltsville, Maryland. During National Library Week, April 5-12, 1992, it is perhaps appropriate to consider NAL.

At NAL, the age-old science of agriculture is being merged with the infant science of electronic information management to form a union that the library believes will improve the world.

This is a lofty boast, but NAL's Director Joseph Howard gives a convincing argument.

"Information management technology is taking hold with a vengeance at NAL," Howard said. "We in turn have grasped it with a determination to become its master."

To Howard, the implications of mastery are thrilling.

"The information at NAL, dating back hundreds of years, contains the answers to many of the world's problems," he said. "If we can learn to use the technology at our disposal to get that information to those who need it, I believe the world can begin to conquer at least some of its most chronic problems, particularly hunger and related diseases."

Holding up a silver-colored, five-inch plastic disk, Howard gave an example.

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"On this little disk, which is small enough for me to carry in my coat pocket, is contained thousands of pages of information on aquaculture," he said. "Providing copies of the disk to developing countries could give them the information needed to develop basic fish farm operations that could feed millions."

The aquaculture disk was produced by NAL through a process called text digitizing, in which pages of information are "scanned" and converted to an electronic form a computer can use. Through additional procedures the information can be transferred onto one plastic CD-ROM (compact disk-read only memory). CD-ROMs allow users to find desired information quickly and easily.

Since 1987, NAL has been experimenting with text digitizing, looking for the most efficient combination of computer hardware and software in order to develop a system that will thoroughly serve the agricultural community. In 1991, this effort became fully operational under the National Agricultural Text Digitizing Program (NATDP). Working closely with NAL on this project since it began have been land-grant university libraries throughout the United States. More recently, the United States Agricultural Information Network (USAIN), an organization of agricultural information specialists from government, the academic community, and private industry, has begun playing a significant role in NATDP as well, supporting the program and testing many of the pilot disks.

With text digitizing, NAL is able to produce disks containing volumes of agricultural information and provide the disks to organizations, such as land-grant university libraries, with a need for that information. Through the disks, agricultural researchers using these libraries have access to agricultural research information sometimes available nowhere else except at NAL.

Besides aquaculture, NAL has produced CD-ROMs containing information on acid rain (working in conjunction with the University of Vermont), food irradiation, Agent Orange, and international agricultural research (working with the Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research).

NAL is now working closely with Tuskegee University in developing a disk containing selected works from the collection of research materials of George Washington Carver, the famous African-American agricultural scientist. Still other disks are planned.

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Perhaps the library's oldest and most successful use of computer technology is NAL's AGRICOLA (*AGRICultural OnLine Access*) database. AGRICOLA contains the bibliographic records of nearly 2.7 million agricultural books, reports, visuals, theses, and articles from throughout the world. NAL staff constantly add to this number. Access to AGRICOLA is available online or on CD-ROMs.

"To see what information is available on a particular agricultural subject, and where it is located, a person merely has to type in a few key words," Howard said. "AGRICOLA will quickly direct the person to that information."

Howard gave one final example of how information management technology has become indispensable at NAL.

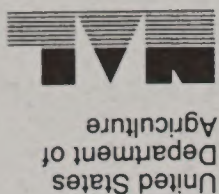
"We have set up an electronic bulletin board that allows those who don't have physical access to our facilities, nonetheless, to get agricultural information," he said.

The bulletin board, called the Agricultural Library Forum (ALF), can be accessed 24-hours a day, 7 days a week by anyone with compatible computer equipment. Information available ranges from bulletins to messages and computer conferences to whole files of materials.

For example, if a user had recently perused ALF, he or she could have gotten information on marketing agricultural goods overseas, or low-input, sustainable agriculture, or rural development. Many other agricultural subjects also were covered.

ALF telephone numbers are (301) 504-6510/5111/5496/5497 or FTS 964-6510/5111/5496/5497. Communications software should be set at 300, 1200, or 2400 baud, full duplex, no parity, 8 data bits, and 1 stop bit. More information on ALF is available at (301) 504-5113.

With the Library of Congress and the National Library of Medicine, NAL is one of three national libraries of the United States. NAL is the world's largest agricultural library, with over 2.1 million volumes on 48 miles of bookshelves on 7 of its 17 floors.



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